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The origins of the Jimmy Savile Scandal

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the origins of the Jimmy Savile Scandal in which the former BBC entertainer was accused of a series of sexual offences after his death in 2011. The case has had a massive impact on UK policing and criminal justice policy and on care work, with implications for due process and public expenditure in responding to reports of sexual abuse.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper draws on an Economic and Social Research Council funded project to collate data on the Savile case. It is based, primarily, on interview material from former pupils and staff members from Duncroft School, from whence initial allegations against Savile emanate, contrasting these with media accounts.

Findings

The research provides a very different picture of Duncroft and the contemporary policy context to that presented in media accounts. A questioning account of the origins of the scandal emerges. The findings may lend themselves to a moral panics analysis but also point to the power of dominant stories in influencing public policy.

Research limitations/implications

This paper is based on only a very small sample of interviews. The material is ethically sensitive in that it may be claimed or used to cast doubt on accounts of abuse.

Social implications

The implications of the wider project from which it draws are potentially profound, casting doubt on the origins and detail of the Savile scandal.

Originality/value

The paper addresses one of the major socio-cultural episodes in recent British history, which has had a profound effect on the workings of the criminal justice system, signalling a shift away from a presumption of innocence. It also offers insight into the cultural context of care work and the possibility, especially for males, of being subject to allegations made against them.

Keywords:

Scandal, Allegations, Duncroft, Historical abuse, Jimmy Savile, Residential schools

Introduction

This article problematises what is, arguably, the most prominent chapter in recent UK cultural history, in which the former BBC entertainer Jimmy Savile¹ is alleged to have sexually abused hundreds of children over the past fifty years. The case has been employed to justify significant changes in policing and criminal justice policy responses to claims of non-recent abuse. The article explores the origins of the Savile scandal.

The subject of child sexual abuse (CSA) is often claimed to meet the criteria of a moral panic as described in Cohen's (2002) seminal work (Clapton et al, 2013). Furedi (2013) extends the moral panic analysis to one of 'moral crusade', arguing that the enduring focus on CSA does not meet with the transient nature of moral panics and that the Savile case is but another episode in this wider crusade. Jenkins (1998) and Frankfurter (2005) are supportive of the crusade analogy, arguing that a belief that children are subject to existential, demonic threat is a persistent theme throughout history. More recently and despite authoritative critiques (La Fontaine, 1998; Webster, 2005), the satanic ritual abuse controversy, which swept the US and the UK over the course of the 1980s and '90s, reprises in the Savile case (Fielding, 2013), suggesting that a belief in demonic threats still has traction in the public imagination.

Against this broader backcloth, a belief that physical and sexual abuse was endemic in children's care homes has become what Webster terms 'an unquestioned orthodoxy' (2009, p. 10). Institutional abuse stories have become reified in various victim accounts and in a growing number of official reports across much of the developed, particularly the Western, world (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997; Waterhouse, 2000; Ryan, 2009; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Jurisdictions across the UK have set up major inquiries into historical abuse. While there is little doubt that sexual abuse occurred in care settings, more than had hitherto been appreciated, many would question whether it was as endemic as is now claimed. Indeed, evidence for the scale of such abuse is questioned: Birch, (2004), for instance, contests much of the Australian Stolen Generation material; Kaufman (2002) questions the alleged scale of abuse in a major case in Nova Scotia; Niezen (2013) subjects the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission to anthropological scrutiny, broadening the Commission's focus on victim accounts to include the perspectives of the Religious Orders who staffed the residential schools, while Webster (2005) deconstructs the Waterhouse Report (2000), which sets down what has become the master narrative in respect of historical abuse in the UK.

These divergent perspectives confirm CSA as contested terrain, polarising opinions between those La Fontaine (1998) identifies as believers (of those who claim abuse or imagine children

¹ Sir Jimmy Savile (1926-2011) was an English television and radio personality who at the time of his death had been lauded for his charitable work. Subsequently, claims emerged that Savile was a paedophile whose charitable work provided access to children (see Gray and Watt, 2013).

to be subject to existential threat) and sceptics, who appeal to more objective reason and evidence. More generally, Dreger (2015) identifies ongoing tensions between those purporting to follow a scientific or intellectually rigorous line of academic inquiry with the demands of activist groups to promote and maintain a particular narrative, especially when the subject matter involves anything to do with sex. In the context of prevailing social commentaries around CSA and victimhood, there are, then, significant intellectual and political disincentives to challenge dominant narratives; those doing so are likely to be accused of denial or victim blaming. Yet the failure to do so may allow other abuses to take root. Frankfurter (2006) cautions that it is not in the activities of some evil individual or cult that real atrocities occur but in attempts to purge these. In this regard, it is important to begin to explore the reverberations of the Savile narrative. Concerns about wrongful allegations of abuse in the wake of the case are beginning to surface (Burnett, 2016) and specifically allegations made against those in occupations of trust (Hoyle *et al*, 2016). While police and activist accounts tend to minimize the scale of false allegations, a recent meta-analysis indicates that, across all categories, this is higher than reported (Ferguson and Malouff, 2016) while Piper and Sikes (2010) and Webster (2005) identify false allegations in respect of those *in loco parentis* roles to be a major social problem.

The impact of the Savile case on policing and criminal justice policy

In the UK, allegations of sexual abuse made against Jimmy Savile, which emerged in an ITV *Exposure* documentary a year after his death in 2011, constitute what Innes (2014) might classify as a signal crime, identifying something thought to be wrong in a particular matter of public concern and demanding a reorientation of policing responses to put it right. The Savile case has been employed to indicate unease over how victims of CSA have been dealt with in the past by the police and prosecutors. It has legitimised major changes in policing and criminal justice policy, specifically in respect of how allegations of historical abuse are addressed, leading to the prosecution and in some cases conviction, of a number of aged entertainers. It has gone on to spark a scandal that has engulfed the British state in claims of high-level paedophilia and cover-up. In policy terms, it has led to a default presumption that those claiming to be victims of abuse should be believed. This imperative to 'believe' the victim has been challenged by the Henriques Review (2016) into the practice of the Metropolitan Police in *Operation Midland*, set up to investigate allegations made against politicians and other public figures, based largely on the claims of a complainant, 'Nick', whose story has subsequently unraveled. The use of the term 'victim' for complainants persists, however.

Regardless of the provenance of such high-profile complaints, they have had a major impact on the criminal justice system. At a time when crime, especially violent crime, has fallen substantially across most of the developed world (in England and Wales violent crime has dropped by 66 per cent since its peak in 1995 (Office for National Statistics, 2016)), there has been a recent increase in reports of sexual crime, which is thought to reflect a greater willingness of victims to come forward to report such crimes in the wake of the Savile case. Sexual crimes now constitute a massive proportion of Court business; in Scotland, for example, around 80% of cases processed through the High Court are for sexual offences, many of these

historic (Carloway, 2016). This prosecutory response to sex crimes and the erosion of due process rights (Burnett *et al*, 2017) maintains prison populations at historically high levels.

Below the surface of the focus on celebrities and politicians, residential child care workers face a renewed series of investigations. The Police's Operation Pallial re-opened allegations made against care workers in North Wales in the 1990s, while the Macur Review (2016) was established to review the findings of the Waterhouse Tribunal following claims made by alleged victims of abuse that it had been insufficiently thorough. A result of this upsurge in activity is that residential care workers across the UK find themselves investigated, prosecuted and in many cases convicted on account of claims made by former residents, often stemming back decades (Rose, 2016). Press reports indicate that those claiming to have been abused often point to the Savile case and responses to it as giving them the strength to disclose their own childhood experiences.

Initial allegations against Savile

Initial allegations against Savile emanate from former residents of Duncroft, a Home Office girls' approved school in the South of England. Some former Duncroft residents claim that, during the 1960s and 1970s, Savile sexually abused them on school premises and while on visits to television studios. An image is presented in press reports of Duncroft as a lax and abusive regime. We report here on an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project to collate a data set on the Savile case, including the accounts of former residents and staff members from Duncroft who paint a very different picture of life there, of the care offered and of Savile's involvement.

In delving into social work history we do so against a backdrop tendency in the discipline to rely on 'received' histories and the reiteration of familiar arguments and themes (Taylor, 2008). In the field of child welfare, received histories have tended to reflect the agendas of children's charities and this colonisation of the field has continued to the present day (Clapton and Cree, 2016). The NSPCC has played a particularly prominent role historically and specifically in the Savile case, co-authoring (with the Metropolitan Police) the document, *Giving Victims a Voice* (Gray and Watt, 2013). Taylor (2008) argues the need to engage with and challenge received histories through empirical research that is focused, localized and fine-grained. We hope this article can contribute to such an endeavour.

The standard story of Savile at Duncroft

As noted, reporting of the Savile case evokes a particularly negative image of the culture in Duncroft. One former pupil was quoted as saying that 'Jimmy treated Duncroft like a paedophile sweet shop. He used to take his pick of the mix. He would wander around the school in a vest and tracksuit bottoms. ... He stayed in a flat on the top floor Who knows what horrors happened up there ...' (Alleyne and Mason, 2012).

Another told how Savile assaulted her in his Rolls-Royce after the headmistress, Miss Jones,

asked if she wanted to go for a run with him. Former residents claimed that they had reported the abuse to school staff, including Miss Jones, who allegedly replied: 'Don't be stupid.' This dismissive attitude was represented by one of the girls through what has become the standard story of institutional abuse – that of innocent victims whose pleas for help fell on deaf ears: 'The girls at Duncroft had been sent there by the courts for prostitution, drugs and because they tried to kill themselves. Who would have believed us against Saint Jimmy?' (France and Nash, 2012).

A picture emerges of Miss Jones as a callous individual who presided over Savile's alleged abuse. She is said to have described those making complaints as delinquents who were looking for money. For her part, Miss Jones denied any knowledge of abuse insisting that if any of her girls had told her what Savile was doing to them, she would have thrown him 'out on his ear' and reported him to police. ... 'Nobody ever complained to me. Not one girl complained to me or my staff'. She goes on, in the same interview, to express her personal view of Savile: 'I didn't like him, ... 'I thought he was an odd bod' (Ellicott and Greenhill, 2012).

The level of public outrage following the initial allegations against Savile led to a number of official reports, perhaps the most influential of which was *Giving Victims a Voice* (Gray and Watt), which states:

On the whole victims are not known to each-other and taken together their accounts paint a compelling picture of widespread sexual abuse by a predatory sex offender. We are therefore referring to them as 'victims' rather than 'complainants' and are not presenting the evidence they have provided as unproven allegations (2013, p.4).

In a similar vein, Surrey Police (2015) contacted former Duncroft pupils to invite testimony regarding Savile's activities at the school, stating: 'Please be assured that the welfare of victims is the primary concern of both Surrey Police and Barnardo's. This is a search for the truth and you will be believed'.

On the one hand, such assurances may be argued to be necessary to enable victims of abuse who have been disbelieved in the past to speak out in confidence that they will now be heard. On the other, treating claims as facts and accusers as victims while raising the expectation of those who make allegations that these do not need to be verified is epistemologically and ethically problematic. As Portelli notes, 'The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism and desire emerge' (2006, p.37). Portelli is careful to go on to say that factual accounts may nevertheless be psychologically true for those who recount them, a point we return to. It is equally important, though, that such unverified claims do not trump important legal principles. Were the stories told by former Duncroft girls merely among their ways of making sense of troubled pasts, then one might acknowledge the psychological truth of their stories. When they implicate and are used to posthumously pronounce individuals guilty without due process of law then this becomes troubling (Scarre, 2012).

The initial approach

The Principal Investigator on the ESRC grant on which this article is based is a former residential care worker, now a social work academic, who, with colleagues, was working on the concept of moral panic, (and author, 2015). In early 2013, they received the following e-mail from a former Duncroft pupil stating:

I blog on the Internet as 'Anna Raccoon' and as such have published several articles on the current 'Savile saga'. However, having found myself at the centre of the 'Duncroft' furore, I have also been given a mound of information which I have not yet published. ... I am not in good health ... I am growing concerned that should I kick the proverbial bucket, then the knowledge and the contacts that I hold will be lost forever, and one day academics will want to piece together the origins of this current panic.

The allegation that prompted Anna Raccoon's interest in the Savile case was made by a former resident, Bebe Roberts². Mrs Roberts claimed that Savile had assaulted her at Duncroft in 1965 when she was 15: 'If you were walking down the corridor he would come up close and touch you inappropriately ... He always came when we were getting ready for bed. There were girls in there who were quite terrified of him' (Greenhill and Ellicott, 2012).

Anna Raccoon had shared a dormitory in Duncroft with Bebe Roberts in the mid 1960s and had never seen Savile there. She began to write questioning accounts on her blog and these were supported and added to by other former pupils. Our interview with the former resident who claims to have introduced Savile to Duncroft indicates that he first visited in 1974, a fact subsequently confirmed by Surrey Police's *Operation Outreach* (2015). Bebe Roberts' account of being assaulted by Savile in Duncroft in the mid 1960s is clearly not borne out by other sources of evidence.

Not long after the initial approach from Anna Raccoon, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) put out a call for 'Urgent' research proposals. Given the important nature of the subject matter and the fact that key informants were elderly or unwell, we applied for and were awarded a grant. The project involved the collection and archiving of Anna Raccoon's social media content and interviewing former staff and pupils from Duncroft. We also gathered the various official reports into Savile's activities. All this material has been brought together digitally in a database, which allows for cross-referencing between different sources. This article focuses on the oral accounts of former staff and residents.

Ethics

Undertaking research of this nature could be represented as dismissing the accounts and, by extension, the experiences of those claiming abuse. On the other hand, the project confronts major issues of justice related to the presumption of innocence, the status of complainants'

² As Bebe Roberts' name is given in newspaper articles we have not sought to anonymise it

accounts, adherence to legal principles, the rule of law several decades after the alleged offences and the defamation of the dead, all of which merit being aired publically. The project was approved through the research ethics processes at the University of Edinburgh.

We set out to interview as many former staff members and residents as we could. For a variety of reasons, some potential interviewees were reluctant to talk. Whilst the research was taking place, police investigations were ongoing and former staff members, including Miss Jones, now in her mid 90s, were caught up in these and felt that to talk to us might count against them. We sought to reach out to as broad a range of former staff and residents, including those who had made allegations against Savile but apart from an anonymous email that seemed it might have been from one of these, we did not manage to engage any complainants.

In the event we interviewed Anna Raccoon herself, another resident from the 1960s and two former residents from the 1970s, including the girl who introduced Savile to Duncroft. We also interviewed the former Deputy Head of the School and a former Head of Education. Inevitably, numbers are small but there is some variety of viewpoints – one of the residents did not enjoy her time at Duncroft and railed against much of what it stood for but, nevertheless, refuted the stories being told about Savile.

Duncroft School

The Duncroft building was the site where King John signed *Magna Carta* and is mentioned in the Doomsday Book. It became an approved school in 1945 managed by the National Association for Mental Health. Following the 1969 Children and Young Person's Act, it became a Community Home with Education before being taken over in 1976 by the children's charity Dr Barnado's. In the early 1960s it became an experimental approved school reflecting a contemporary optimism regarding how better to address what was known at the time as juvenile delinquency. It:

... was the dream of Dr Hamilton Pearson, who was a psychiatrist at the Home Office and worked in the children's department, And he dreamt of this school where girls who were psychiatrically disturbed could be treated. So a psychiatrist was appointed, psychiatric social worker, an educational psychologist (Deputy Head).

The school had psychiatrists that would come in. ... I only remember one ..., she was one of the Maudsley (the famous mental health training hospital in London) crowd. So, I think that's where they were pulling them all from (1960s resident).

A new wing at the School was opened in 1966 by Lord Rab Butler, who had overseen the passage of the 1944 Education Act and had gone on to serve as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. Butler expressed the view in a local newspaper piece that 'it was wonderful that the girls were indeed being helped and not punished – and their well-being was evident in the fact that so many of them gained GCE passes while at the school He congratulated the head-mistress, Miss Margaret Jones and her staff on the remarkable work they were doing – 'and it is pioneer work for the whole country', he

added. 'This was one of the most important experiments of its type in the country'.

Staff members were similarly positive about the school:

A good and excellent school, yeah. I mean, we were managed on behalf of the Home Office by the National Association for Mental Health. And we had a wonderful Board of management ... And also, the managers visited once a month on a rota basis, and any girl who wished to see a manager, they came specifically to chat (Head of Education).

In the context of residential schools at that time, placement in Duncroft was understood by many of the girls to be a preferential option:

.... most of the approved schools in those days weren't exactly a party. (Going to Duncroft) ... was like being told you were going to spend your life at Butlins. In terms of the approved schools, it was considered to be the place to end up (1960s resident).

This view wasn't shared by all of the pupils, though. One specifically felt that '(the staff's) whole attitude was, you're here to be warehoused, controlled, contained, ...' (1970s resident).

The girls

In the 1960s, most children would have left school at 15. Those who attended Duncroft might, in other circumstances, have stayed on, but due to a range of family difficulties had struggled with education. Unlike other approved schools, some girls had previously been at boarding school: 'No, I was at boarding schools, my dear, we had money, money, you know' (1960s resident). Anna Raccoon, however, suggests that boarding school backgrounds were not the norm and that the school demographic was mostly working and lower middle class.

A more explicit criterion for entrance, at least over the course of the 1960s, was intelligence: '(Margaret Jones) only wanted girls who were... it didn't matter the background so much, but intelligent and beyond intelligent, because that was what she figured she could work the best with' (1960s resident). Girls' previous history was such that 'most of them, I think, knew a whole lot more than they needed to at that age. They were pretty a sophisticated crowd really for those days, ...' (Head of Education). For most, that included sex. 'Yes, there weren't any virgins, I think there was probably only one that we knew of there' (1970s resident). Another was even more forthright: '... we were mostly sexually active, highly precocious. I was the only one who didn't take drugs. I was the only one who didn't smoke, and I was definitely sexually active, and even sexually aggressive' (1970s resident).

Accounts of the girls' sexual experience and behaviour indicate a degree of agency in sexual activity, which challenges the current orthodoxy of them as victims of predatory adults. The former residents we spoke to did not regard themselves as victims and any sexual activity they might have entered into was considered to have been consensual and in some cases initiated

by the girls (although none claimed to have any knowledge of Savile being involved sexually with girls at Duncroft). This raises complicated ethical questions around adult sexual behaviours with underage children being wrong but more complicated than might be accommodated by dichotomous victim/perpetrator classifications (author and , 2016; Hallett, 2017) and not necessarily leading to subsequent adverse life experiences (author and , 2016). At another level, it raises questions around the right to label someone a victim when they do not regard themselves as such, either at the time or retrospectively (see Best, 1997).

The staff

Duncroft was staffed by what might now be called social care workers. They often came from institutional backgrounds such as the police or religious life. Many were motivated by religious or other conviction and often remained unmarried (Webb, 2010). Some would have considered themselves to be feminists and were thought of as such (not always favourably) by former pupils: 'you've got this little pot of early radical feminists, who were projecting all their ambitions, and desires, and needs on (to the girls)' (1970s resident). These 'live-in' carers were the core staff group, distinguished from teachers who lived off campus.

In Duncroft two individuals, the headmistress, Miss Jones, and her Deputy, Miss Cole, presided over the school throughout the 1960s and 1970s. While they were very different characters and there were evident tensions between them, they nevertheless provided a continuity of culture over that period. Miss Cole, a former nun, maintained a censorious tone. She was uncomfortable about Jimmy Savile's presence in the school. Miss Jones was perhaps more open to the need to embrace the changing world of the 1960s:

Yes, they (the girls) liked Margaret Jones, she was bright, she was gregarious, she could chivvy them along. She could be severe, if she needed to be severe but Margaret Jones and Ruth Cole were very, very different ladies and that was good for the girls because there was always someone there that suited the girls (Head of Education).

In fact, not all the girls were so positive about Miss Jones: 'So, you've got Maggie Jones strutting around like Miss Jean Brodie, ... Literally, hello girls, good morning, you know, how are you young ladies, straight out of Jean Brodie, and it was preposterous ...' (1970s resident). It was this same Miss Jean Brodie demeanour, though, that prompted our interviewee to say: 'I don't believe the Savile allegations for a moment, she was too much of a snob to place any value on him'.

While she may have been slightly more liberal than Miss Cole, Miss Jones' liberalism did not extend to permissive sexual practices on Duncroft premises:

If Margaret Jones had thought that there was anybody in the dormitories or anybody touching her girls she would have choked on her cornflakes and that was the terminology she used. Because Margaret would have done, she would have exploded,

absolutely exploded (Head of Education).

Such a reaction would not have been surprising in the context of the time. While some of the Duncroft girls may have been in the vanguard of the swinging 60's, the period was not, more generally, one of sexual permissiveness (Sandbrook, 2009). In fact, residential schools have historically played a role in policing girls' sexuality (O'Neil, 2001) and this seems to be a feature of the Duncroft regime.

Education

Educational provision in the school was fairly rounded if traditionally gendered:

Because many of (the girls) had had a fragmented education, many of them had started study for GCE and wanted to continue to do so. And so we covered many, many subjects: shorthand typing; Miss Jones' brother taught history for me; the local vicar came in to teach religious studies; they did dancing and singing; art. As I say I taught food and they had English and French.. ...If they came to me and said I want to continue studying mathematics then I would find somebody who could study mathematics. some things went into the evening particularly things like singing or dancing. (Name) would teach ballet and dance (Head of Education).

It was not always experienced this way, however. 'Now, Duncroft itself was really weird, you would take a load of girls that you're calling high IQ and you train them to be secretaries and receptionists' (1970s resident). This contrast between a staff view of a benign institution and the way it was experienced by residents might evoke images of the existence of parallel worlds existing in institutional settings (Goffman, 1961). Staff members felt they were doing a good and caring job but it was not always experienced that way, largely, this former resident would argue, because of an emotional distance between the two groups.

Savile at Duncroft

The received story of Savile's involvement with Duncroft suggests that he inveigled his way in to secure sexual access to the girls. There was, however, a pre-existing tradition of celebrity involvement with the school:

The husband of the school psychiatrist worked at Shepperton (film studios), so a lot of access came through him. But, they were older movie star types. ... Yes, James Robertson Justice. Now, he was great in school and he was lovely with the girls ... (Deputy Head).

Savile was introduced to Duncroft by a former pupil he had met at a function where she was helping her mother. It is fair to say that early contact between Savile and the girl did indicate sexual intentions on his part, albeit these were not followed through when he realised her age.

There was perhaps a sense of favouritism within the relationship. 'We were special friends, and I think the girls accepted that it was something to do with my family, there was a connection, ...'. In contrast to previous celebrities who tended to be ageing film-stars or minor Royals, Savile offered the Duncroft girls access to the new pop culture. He gave his contact pop records to take back to Duncroft with an offer of him visiting:

So, I went back carrying the records and ... explained that I had met him at a private function, ..., they (the headmistress) were interested in whether or not he took ... he was anything at all to do with drugs and I convinced them that he wasn't, and he didn't drink, never drank alcohol in his life.... Then, it was arranged, and he came to Duncroft for the first time, fairly soon after... (1970s resident).

If Savile's introduction to the school was vetted, his times at Duncroft were similarly so. He would bring cigarettes for the girls but these were handed over and distributed by Miss Jones. Some girls thought they might prevail on the girl who had introduced him to get extra cigarettes: '(they) thought I could possibly persuade him, but not even for me, I couldn't get any cigarettes. So, anybody that thinks that he gave them cigarettes, they were given to the Headmistress and she shared them out ...' (1970s resident).

The same pupil also puts a different gloss on the story of the Rolls Royce journeys. She suggested that Savile did take girls out in his car on organised outings but again paints a different picture of what did or did not go on there and the sexual dynamics that could be around:

... so I said, if you take me out for a car ride on my own, I said, as soon as we get down the road the first thing I'm going to do is I'm going to try and get your pants off. And, he turned round and said ... because, I was tempting him, and that, it was sort of in the girls to be provocative like that. So, I was saying that, to see...and straight away he turned round and he said, nothing like that is going to happen. I mean, he wasn't horrid about it, he just said, I can't take you ... (1970s resident).

If this account might function to portray Savile as having some sexual boundaries, wider contextual detail might suggest that he did not have the run of the school in the way that newspaper reports suggest and certainly not access to the dormitories:

Jimmy Savile, he would not have been, why would he have been up there (the dormitories)? There was no reason for him to be up there. He would go into the junior common room, which was across from the staff living room. I'm quite sure when he was in there those doors were open and people, the staff, were sticking their heads in every ten minutes. That's what they did (Head of Education).

Had he sought to enter the dormitories he would likely have encountered Miss Cole and other staff patrolling the corridors: 'so you couldn't really get past her because she was hyper vigilant. I mean hyper vigilant, and Miss K too, hyper vigilant. So, you just couldn't get things past them'

(1960s resident).

Operation Outreach claims that there is evidence that Savile spent at least two nights in Duncroft. The Deputy Head recalls: 'I know Margaret Jones said he did spend one night there, but he was in a separate building, with no access to the girls at all, because he had something going on the next day'. Had he attempted to sneak into the dormitories the security procedures were such that he would have struggled:

the senior member of staff on duty would lock all the downstairs doors and then the keys would be put in the key safe in the office. And before I went to bed at night, I would collect those keys so that I always had them there in case there was a fire, you know. So there was no way anybody could get into the school, ... (Deputy Head).

Another angle on the supervisory regime in the school was offered by one of the former residents:

I'm an Autistic, you torture me by denying me privacy, oh where does that segue into the Jimmy Savile story? If an Autistic is so freaked out that she screams the place down because she can't get any privacy, I wonder where he took all those girls to abuse them. I wish I'd known where it was when I was there ... None of it fits, none of it fits at all (1970s resident).

A further aspect of the culture might also have acted against Savile getting away with abusive behaviour:

It was an intimate environment where secrets were hard to keep and gossip is easily spread ... So, if anybody ... if Mr Savile had done anything at all inappropriate I would have been the first to hear, because they would have delighted in rubbing it in ... (1970s resident).

It did, nevertheless, seem that Savile's presence in the school could create sexual tensions among the girls, which on at least one occasion came out into the open:

I was told, there's something going on with the girls ... (name) has fallen in love with Jimmy. ... And, that was the very first inkling, (name) has fallen in love, it was after one of the visits. ... I thought, oh silly (name) she was a bit lovey-dovey, and she was a bit gentle ... (1970s resident).

When Savile was told of this love interest he responded:

Oh, I see, she's got a crush. That's it, that was his exact words, oh I see, I see what's happened, she's got a crush that's it. Then, he said something about, oh I might have to keep away for a while (1970s resident).

It seems, in fact, as though Savile's visits to Duncroft came to a natural end after the girl he had the connection with left. When, having left the school she met him, she asked whether he had continued to visit:

..., he said, I went there a couple of times, and he hesitated, he thought, two or three times at the most, and he said, that's because, he said, the last time, somebody wrote to him. He hadn't been there but when he went there all the people had changed, it was entirely different, and he didn't like ... and he said he wouldn't go there again (1970s resident).

The allegations

When, more than forty years later, allegations against Savile began to emerge, they did so on the social media message boards. The view of the former pupils we spoke to was that the whole situation had mushroomed out of control:

this nonsense about Jimmy Saville started up as like, you know, little kids, give it a wee try see how far that runs, and if it doesn't run far enough they ramp it up a little bit. And, that's being going on since 2007. I think they thought it would be hushed up quietly, money paid, they had no idea that this snowball was going to take off, you know (1970s resident).

As other former Duncroft girls began to contribute to the message boards and to question the tales of abuse, the exchanges became ever-more acrimonious. 'Basically, the nastiness got so intense, I couldn't tell who was real and who was false, people claiming to be real weren't' (1970s resident). This social media dimension might cast doubts on the Police's assertion that those making allegations were unknown to one another and their accounts could thus be argued to provide independent corroboration of allegations.

Discussion

This article cannot discount the possibility that Savile sexually abused girls at Duncroft but it paints a very different picture of the culture in the school which, it is claimed, allowed such abuse to happen unchecked. It was not a lax or uncaring institution but a pioneering and highly regarded one. The reality of Savile's time there is far less sinister and more quotidian than reported. In the regime described, he may have been able to take his chance to exploit girls opportunistically (although there is no convincing evidence that he did) but it seems unlikely that he could have behaved in the uncontained manner that press and official reports claim and upon which the wider narrative rests. The version of events set out in our interviews might be thought to convince in its consonance with narrative conventions of plot, setting and characterisation (Riessman, 2000). Miss Jones becomes a real person, an image given some substance by the description of the tensions between her and her Deputy. Jimmy Savile, too, emerges as a far more nuanced character than police or media accounts allow. One of the

former pupils presciently identified some of the flaws in the narrative construction of the dominant Duncroft story. 'Well, even back then, I noticed if you were talking about real abuse it was boring, like any real story, it doesn't have the right beginning, middle and end, it doesn't have the high points' (1970s resident).

Nevertheless, the Savile story has had massive political and cultural reverberations, provoking a crisis in the British state. As one of our interviewees stated:

But, what bothers me, it did all start at Duncroft and, I mean, the basics of that, what do you call it, emotional contagion and football crowds, the ripples go out, somebody starts it and they send out ... It started with Duncroft and a story, and then that programme (the *Exposure* documentary), and before you know it the ripples were going out so much that it went out of control... (1960s resident).

If the Savile story is not as reported, then this prompts questions of how such a powerful public narrative might have taken root. In this final section we offer some preliminary sociological analysis, contesting the naïve realist position embraced in current dominant police and activist positions, whereby the stories told by those who allege abuse are claimed to offer a mirror to actual events. We briefly consider the role of stories in identity construction, the privileging of particular stories and the place of memory in mediating the past. We then make some observations about the role of scandal in driving public policy.

Stories

Plummer (1995) identifies how we use stories to make sense of ourselves and the world around us. We construct stories to interpret and reinterpret our experiences, helping fashion a sense of self (Woodiwiss, 2015). Life-stories, connect and integrate the past with the present. This is perhaps especially important in respect of those who grew up in institutional care and whose stories have often lacked continuity or coherence (Murphy, 2010). In constructing their stories, however, people are not free to tell any story but draw on the cultural narratives currently circulating (Woodiwiss, 2009). MacIntyre (1997) points to how individual stories go on to become embedded in those of the communities from which an individual derives their identity. Thus, individual life-stories interleave and resonate with the available repertoire of public narratives about similar experiences, heralding the collective identity of the abused careleaver.

Stories are relayed through the accounts by which social actors explain, make sense of and perhaps mitigate their behaviours (Davis, 2005). For those who do not regard themselves to be in control of the forces that shape their lives, a claim to have been abused and access to the victim status this confers can provide some narrative coherence (Davis, 2005). In the present therapeutic cultural climate, such accounts are almost bound to be believed; there are major psychological forces at work that inhibit questioning (Tavris and Aronson, 2007). The victim identity, however, is rarely a healthy one – it can prevent one from moving on in life (author, 2016).

Memory

The realist position adopted by the police and activists on the status of people's stories extends to their understanding of memory, which is assumed to correspond to actual events (or which, reprising the memory wars of the 1990s (Hacking, 1995), might be thought to be repressed and subsequently recovered). This is essentially a videotape understanding of how memory operates, which assumes that it can be accurately played back and that similar accounts might be thought to corroborate one another. Memory, however, does not work like this. Nash and Ost (2016) capture the consensus in the field that memory is shaped by social, political and political forces and is thus amenable to manipulation, either active or passive, through therapeutic engagement or through the assimilation of cultural stories. In this sense, it links with the way that people use stories to make sense of their lives. Haaken (1998) suggests that when women struggle to speak openly about their experiences they may do so through storytelling, in ways that introduce layers of meaning but which blur the boundaries between 'true' and 'false'. Tavis and Aronson (2007) describe how the lives of unhappy and vulnerable individuals become open to exploitation, by therapists, prosecutors, police officers and personal injury lawyers who profess to offer a solution, often labelled 'closure' to vague feelings that something is not right in life. The authors go on to identify how lives can be destroyed by these intractable and sincerely-held, yet false, beliefs.

Scandal

The Savile case also contributes to research on the role of scandal in driving public policy (Bovens and 'tHart, 1996; Butler and Drakeford, 2005; Lloyd et al, 2014). Butler and Drakeford (2005) argue that scandals are constructed, less as a mirror to any wider reality but, rather, they reflect shifting societal mores and anxieties. Responses to scandals are similarly constructed; Inquiry reports are not neutral fora to 'establish the facts' of a case but devices employed to lay down a particular version of the 'truth' (Butler and Drakeford, 2005). Scandals come about when stories become public property, exciting sustained or intense interest (Butler, 2016), as has happened with the Savile case. Bovens and 'tHart (1996) suggest that scandals are more likely when their subject is already unpopular and when its unfolding can be seen to validate what people 'already knew'. Again, this was so in the Savile case where the protagonist could be seen as an unattractive figure, whose behaviour could, at best, be characterized as sleazy, certainly according to changing public perceptions of acceptable sexual and inter-personal behaviour.

Conclusion

We conclude with some observations that may support Furedi's (2013) identification of child abuse as a moral crusade. Of course, those who wage this crusade will not recognise it as such; they are likely blinded by the cognitive dissonance, which takes over in cases where emotions run high (Tavis and Aronson 2007). Moreover, they see themselves as responding to something where the weight of evidence is assumed to be overwhelming and where any rational person would reach the same conclusion and operate to the same moral economy. But, as Webster observes, it is this very assumption of rationality that is at the heart of what goes wrong in major historical instances of panic over child abuse. He observes:

The widespread belief that, belonging as we do to a rational scientific age, we are no

longer vulnerable to such fantasies, is itself one of the most dangerous of all our delusions. For it is precisely because of our rationalism, and the difficulty we have in acknowledging our own violence and the full depth and complexity of our sexual imagination, that we are probably more susceptible to dangerous projections than we ever have been (2005, online).

This makes it all the more important that in major cultural episodes such as the Savile case a single story does not dominate and it is opened up to alternative viewpoints. Specifically, it needs to be recognized that the stories told about Savile are likely to be complex and multi-layered and may or may not bear much resemblance to actual events. In the current climate it is too easy to accept them uncritically and indeed to canvas more of the same, which has been the modus operandi of the Police and the NSPCC. While it might be argued that the sheer weight of accounts offer compelling evidence of the scale of abuse, it may, equally plausibly, point to the propensity of people, for a host of reasons, to write themselves into a particularly powerful cultural narrative when encouraged to do so.

The implications of questioning the Savile narrative on the basis of going back to where it all began are profound – they unsettle the direction of recent criminal justice policy in respect of its privileging of victim accounts. This point was not lost on the former residents of Duncroft: 'But, yes, I think there's a lot because if all this Duncroft stuff could be debunked then the rest of it is going to fall apart' (1970s resident).

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